



THE BATTLEMENTS

Friends of Saratoga Battlefield

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Gen. Burgoyne October 17, 1777



Saratoga Surrender Site August, 2020

Fiends News

The Friends membership process is changing from a rolling month annual membership to a calendar year term. All memberships for 2021 will begin on January 1, 2021. Members who have provided email addresses will receive renewal notices by email. All others will receive a print mailing. Also new is the option to renew membership on the website using PayPal. Watch your mail or email for a notice and link to the website..

The Friend's website is undergoing renovations to better serve our members and supporters. Currently on the website is an article *Saratoga Surrender Site Cannon Carriage Project*, by Friends President Brian Mumford. Go to <http://www.friendsofsb.org/CannonProgress.html> .for the story behind the cannon pictured above.

The Friends welcome two new Board members this year: Chris Hacker and Ryan Martin. We all look forward to working with them.

Park News

Even though the Visitors Center is currently closed, there is a great deal of activity at the Park. Included are long awaited renovations to the Visitors Center, administrative changes, and cannon emplacement at the surrender site.

The Visitor Center has been closed for renovation. First and foremost is the replacement of all Visitor Center windows and glass doors. This is ongoing and a slow process! During this closure, carpet has been replaced, asbestos in the flooring remediated, reception counters reconfigured to be compliant with the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, and the bookstore redesigned to provide an unobstructed view of the battlefield. Reopening of the Visitors Center is anticipated in April 2021.

Superintendent Amy Bracewell has accepted another position. (see page 8). The National Park Service is conducting a search for her replacement and an interim superintendent will be assigned.

The Friends of the Saratoga Battlefield, with community support, commissioned the firm of Train Rock Ordnance of Tennessee to build carriages for two replica 6-pounder cannons similar to those surrendered by British General Burgoyne to American General Gates. The carriages and cannons have been emplaced in the field of the Surrender Site. Eric Schnitzer, Ranger/Park Historian and Jason Huart, Chief of Facilities provided invaluable technical guidance during this project. (See photo page 8)

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Fog-of-War: Decisions Made in the Fog

By Brian Mumford, President

The origin of the term “*fog of war*” is attributed to Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) and is defined as the uncertainty of situational awareness experienced by participants in military operations before, during, and after the fighting. This uncertainty and confusion occur when the information available to an army is incomplete, inconsistent, late in arriving, difficult to manipulate, or hard to visualize. It can result from too much information as well as from too little.

The *fog of war* played a pivotal role in many of the campaigns during the Revolutionary War. At the Battle of Brooklyn Heights and the siege during the British retreat at Fish Creek in Saratoga (now Schuylerville), decisions made in the *fog-of-war* were influenced by actual atmospheric fog.

Fog of War at the Battle of Brooklyn Heights -- Aug 27-29, 1776

After having evacuated Boston in March 1776, on July 2nd British General William Howe with 400 warships arrived at Staten Island in New York Harbor with plans to capture New York City and gain control of the Hudson River. On August 27th, 30,00 British troops staged an attack on the western end of Long Island at a tiny hamlet called Brooklyn which consisted of only seven or eight houses and an old church. The British surrounded and overwhelmed the 10,000 American troops under the command of General George Washington. Americans suffered nearly 1,000 casualties, with 300 killed and another 1,000 captured. The Americans hastily retreated to a defense location along a three-mile shore line of the East River directly across from New York City, known as Brooklyn Heights.

The East River was not truly a river, but rather a saltwater estuary nearly a mile wide which was famously difficult to navigate with swift, contrary currents and tides often in excess of six feet. Experienced ferryboat crews often took more than an hour fighting the currents in order to cross the river.

While in pursuit of the retreating Americans, Howe received intelligence that the American force was trapped at the river's edge and that the British navy had the East River under control. Warships, such as the frigates *Phoenix* and *Rose* with a total of 64 guns under the command of Howe's brother (Admiral Richard Howe), were ready in New York Harbor off Staten Island prepared to sail up the East River between Brooklyn and Manhattan to block any escape effort by Washington. Based upon the available intelligence Howe was convinced that Washington would surrender in a day or two.

Aware that he had no quick way to reinforce troop losses, Howe was unwilling under the circumstances to needlessly risk the customary casualties which were to be expected during an aggressive frontal attack against an enemy force. No doubt Howe was hoping to avoid a large number of casualties similar to those he suffered a year earlier at Bunker Hill. Assessing the available information, in the *fog of war*, Howe concluded that he had time to employ the time-consuming but safer method of “advancing by approaches.” That is, to avoid the casualties of frontal battle, the British troops would advance against the enemy by having the engineers and

sappers dig trenches toward the American line while throwing up protective embankments with plans to reach and overwhelm the American troops in a day or two.

Hugely outnumbered, having been driven from the field and forced to withdraw to the shore of the East River, and with intelligence that the British navy was in position to sail up the river to block any escape to New York City, Washington nevertheless was committed to fighting it out and was not going to surrender. The Americans had been working for months to fortify the area with redoubts established along the line. The Americans had abundant provisions, plenty of ammunition, and many guns. Washington ordered reinforcement troops be sent over from Manhattan in preparation of defending against the expected frontal attack by the British.

However, April 28th and 29th brought new information. Development of torrential rains and a strong wind from the north rendered it improbable for the British warships to tack up the East River to support the British at Brooklyn Heights and to block any escape. This new weather intelligence, together with learning that Howe was not planning an imminent attack, led Washington, in the *fog of war*, to reconsider his assessment. He called a war council of senior officers, who unanimously approved his plan to undertake an immediate evacuation across the East River.

Washington issued an order to impress all water craft, large and small, that could be located in the vicinity of Manhattan. This order was issued at noon on August 29th and, despite some boats having to be brought a distance of fifteen miles, they were all at the shore of Brooklyn Heights by eight that evening.

The plan was aggressive—to secretly evacuate 9,500 troops together with their equipment and artillery. The great fear of the planners was the possibility that the close-by British might discover the army's preparation to withdrawal in which case they would stop digging to attack with devastating consequences. To implement the surreptitious retreat, beginning in late afternoon of April 29th the troops were ordered to continue maintaining the defense line and do nothing to alert the enemy of any unusual activity. After sunset, group by group the troops were ordered to move from the line to the Brooklyn ferry landing under the cover of darkness while maintaining silence. The embarkation included troops, ammunition, artillery, caissons, provisions, cattle, and horses. General Henry Knox was in charge of a segment of the area where he loaded cannons and carriages onto the flat-bottom



boats. Several cannons were so heavy they sank to their hubs and axles in the mud at the river's edge, where they were spiked and abandoned. All else was successfully removed to Manhattan.

The oars and helms were manned by Brigadier General John Glover's brigade of experienced Marblehead mariners who for upwards of twelve hours traveled back and forth in the darkness negotiating overloaded boats through the East River's turbulent swift currents and rapid tides. Agonizingly, as dawn approached many American troops remained on the shores of Brooklyn, doomed to discovery by the British in the morning light and the resulting onslaught. Yet, as the sun began to rise, a heavy fog settled over the area covering the continuing American evacuation from sight of the British. By mid-morning, as the fog lifted, all 9,500 troops had been safely ferried to Manhattan. General Washington was on the last rescue boat to leave Brooklyn.

Decisions made in the *fog of war*, as well as in actual atmospheric fog, during this battle served to save a significant portion of Washington's newly formed army from total ruin. The decisions by both the Americans and British made in the *fog of war* may very well have avoided an early American surrender and the end of the War for Independence.

Fog of War during the Retreat at Fish Creek--Oct 11, 1777

After suffering defeat at the Second Battle of Saratoga at Bemis Heights, British General John Burgoyne retreated north along the Hudson River toward Fort Edward. Burgoyne hoped to reach Fort Ticonderoga, sixty miles to the north, and eventually escape to Canada.

The American troops were deployed to the west and north of the retreating British as well as on the east side of the Hudson in an effort to surround and block the retreat. An additional prong of the strategy was to advance against Burgoyne from the south by moving up to a position on the south bank of Fish Creek which runs easterly to empty into the Hudson in Saratoga (now Schuylerville). General Horatio Gates—in the *fog of war*—was operating under the current intelligence that British forces had abandoned their entrenched camp on the north side of Fish Creek and had retreated north toward Fort Edward, leaving behind only a light rearguard. Gates, eager to pursue the British, ordered Brigadier General John Nixon to cross Fish Creek at dawn on October 11, 1777, to take possession of what was thought to be an abandoned camp along with any supplies and armament abandoned by the retreating British. General John Glover with his Brigade from Marblehead, Massachusetts, was ordered to follow Nixon into the camp.

During the fall months of 1777, as is true even today, at dawn on the Hudson the chilled morning atmosphere often creates a near twenty-foot plume of dense fog immediately over the water and the adjacent shore. The fog generally burns off by late morning. Gates was aware of the inevitable near-zero visibility which his troops would experience as they advanced through the morning fog into the British camp. However, his orders were based upon the most current intelligence that his troops would be moving against an abandoned British camp.

On the assigned morning, as Glover prepared to follow Nixon into the fog enshrouded British encampment, a captured British soldier reported to Glover that Burgoyne had significantly altered his strategy the previous afternoon by ordering the troops that had retreated to Fort Edward to return south to Fish Creek to rejoin the entrenched army. If true, this newly received information meant a large British force would be in position to repel any advancing American army crossing Fisk Creek.

The British soldier was hurriedly brought to Gates who—in the *fog of war*—made a decision to accept the captive’s intelligence and reject the earlier information. Gates countermanded his orders in time to permit Nixon to reverse his march and to safely return to the southern banks of the creek, thus avoiding what certainly would have been a disastrous ambush by the entire British force which, in fact, was then fully entrenched in the camp with twenty-seven guns and enshrouded in the dense fog.

Gates’ swift determinative decision to recall Nixon—thereby sparing countless soldiers from certain death or capture—which was based upon new unverified information received from an enemy soldier, is a classic example of the pressure under which military leaders must operate within the *fog of war*.

Having been recalled from the potential disaster on Fish Creek, both Nixon and Glover were active in the continuing siege of the British until Burgoyne surrendered five days later. Gates assigned Glover the responsibility for escorting the surrendered Convention Army of about 5,750 on the month-long, march of 250 miles to Boston.

Viewing the events at Brooklyn Heights and Fish Creek, during which vital decisions were made by military leaders in the *fog of war*, it is tempting to speculate as to what might have been the consequences if alternative decisions had been made. Also it is tempting to speculate as to what degree luck played in the outcome of these decisions.

The issue of judging the role of luck versus character when studying military conflicts has been the subject of discussion over the ages. Machiavelli, quoting the great Roman historian Titus Livy (59 BC–17 AD), tells us, “Luck is of little moment to the great general, for it is under the control of his intellect and his judgment.”

Was it luck or rather was it the quality of the character and judgment of General Washington at Brooklyn Heights and General Gates at Saratoga? Upon receiving intelligence of changing circumstance regarding both Howe’s decision to advance by approaches and also the unanticipated arrival of foul weather confronting the navy, what if Washington had not had the foresight, courage, and determination to alter his plans and accomplish the near impossible task of ferrying thousands of troops and equipment over the treacherous East River at night? What if Gates had not had the character to make the decision to countermand his order to attack—a decision based upon his judgment that intelligence given in the *fog of war* by an unknown, captured enemy could be trusted.

The outcome of each of these two battles was key to the American victory of the Revolutionary War and each the result of determinations made in the *fog of war*. Without Washington’s decision to undertake the evacuation

across the East River, many historians believe an American surrender at Brooklyn Heights would have been inevitable and likely would have ended the War for Independence. Gates' successful management of the siege during Burgoyne's retreat assured the British surrender—the turning point of the American Revolution.

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Saratoga Sword Surrender Site October 17, 2020

Opportunities for Member Involvement

In the previous newsletter Board President, Brian Mumford asked if members would be interested in being involved in Friends' projects. Many of our usual projects have been impacted by Covid-19 and this year's Visitor Center renovations. These will resume as soon as possible.

- I love My Park Day (spring event)
- July 4 Naturalization ceremony
- Battlefield Tours for members
- Children's Summer programs
- Friends of the Battlefield Newsletter (semiannual)

Members involvement vary with each activity. It may mean weeding around the boot monument on *I love My Park Day* or passing out lemonade for the Naturalization toast. It may be fund raising, helping to edit the newsletter, or helping at a park event. Your talents may help us in ways we haven't considered.

- **What would you like to help the Friends accomplish??**

Farewell to a Faithful Friend

By Tim Holmes Friends Board Member



A longtime friend of the Friends of Saratoga Battlefield has died.

Robert W. DeSio, 96, passed away peacefully at his residence in Saratoga Springs, NY on Tuesday, September 8, 2020. Bob was the consummate volunteer, Board member, creative thinker, and valued connection to many communities, local and far away. The Friends and the Battlefield (Saratoga National Historical Park) were fortunate to have him as an early and consistent force for 20 years, 1990 to 2010.

Bob and his wife Pat (Brown DeSio of Schuylerville) were among the first and longest serving Board members of the Friends. They enjoyed 70 year of happy marriage and contributed to many aspects of community life in the Saratoga environment. For the Friends, Bob and Pat were leaders in developing and managing the March for Parks, an innovative national initiative the Friends used for years as an event platform for raising funds and public awareness. One of the many projects funded by the March for Parks was creation of a new orientation film, on display at the Battlefield Visitor Center today. The DeSios and the Board were active in production of the film.

Bob was instrumental in advancing public outreach for the Friends on behalf of the National Park, managing publication of the Battlements and public relations in the region. Bob served in most of the Board positions and in many committee roles.

Bob served three years in the Army Air Corps in WWII, Asia Pacific Theater. While in the Air Corps he attended the University of Minnesota and Harvard University. He graduated from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1951. Beginning in 1953 Bob had a productive 33 year career at IBM. He developed a number of positions, including Director of Applied Science, Director of Systems Engineering, Director of Advanced Market Development for the International Division, Director of Corporate Technical Institutes and Corporate Director of University Relations. From IBM Bob brought skills as a capable philanthropist and applied these generously in Saratoga after he and Pat moved here in 1986.

In addition to his service with the Friends, Bob gave abundantly to the development of history, the arts, education and health in the Saratoga sphere. Some of the positions he held were: President of Saratoga Springs Historical Society, Saratoga County Arts Council Board, Yaddo Garden Association, Lake George Opera Board; Skidmore College Business Advisory Board, Saratoga Bridges President; as a Hospice volunteer and Board member and President for nine years of Saratoga Hospital. He continued active with RPI and other bodies of higher learning and was an active congregant at the historic Church of St. Peter in Saratoga Springs. Bob was born in Geneva, NY. Bob is survived by his wife Pat and six of their seven

children, eleven grandchildren and eight great grandchildren. Burial with Military Honors was to be held on Monday September 21, 2020 at the Gerald B.H. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery, 200 Duell Rd, Schuylerville, NY.

Bob's contributions were many and will have a lasting impact.

To his spirit we pay tribute.

with notes from Saratogian article and obituary 2020 09 14



Saratoga Sword Surrender Site August 2020

Superintendent's Message

September 18, 2020, was my last day serving as SNHP Superintendent. My new position is Superintendent of the Roosevelt, Vanderbilt, and Van Buren National Historic Sites in and near Hyde Park, NY. It is always bittersweet to accept a new position and leave a post. I have enjoyed the last five years so much. Saratoga has absolutely become home and I know I will be back to visit!

I am so grateful that the Friends of Saratoga Battlefield board and membership are so passionate about the history of the battles and the significance of the British surrender and the American victory. They are also passionate about ensuring these sites are preserved and look the best for every visitor who comes to the park.

Over the past five years, it has been a great pleasure to work with the Friends on a variety of projects for the historic park and also assisting with the Friends' project to develop the Saratoga Surrender Site.

Thank you to everyone who cares about SNHP. Your love and passion will continue to fuel the improvements and preservation activities in the coming years. I look forward to seeing what you do!

Amy Bracewell, Superintendent

Gunpowder: It's Not Just for Muskets Anymore

By Joe Craig, Park Volunteer

Eighteenth Century medical practices often come in for severe criticism from modern more observers. Certainly, much of this is deserved, at least with benefit of the hindsight which we enjoy from the comforts of the present.

It is notable that in the 1700's there was no real dentistry, as a medical field, except for Pierre Fauchard (1678-1762). Fauchard disproved the ancient notion that dental caries were caused by worms, and even pioneered the drilling of such caries to prevent further decay. Most people did not have access to someone like Fauchard, and dental care was little more than extracting a bad tooth.

Having bad teeth seems to be a fairly common problem. The wealthy had access to too much sugar in their diets. Diets of poorer persons might include hominy, dried maize whose hulls were removed by an alkaline solution from lye. Remnants of the lye could damage the enamel, and the sugars in the kernels could be as bad, or worse, than the effects of cane sugar. Most bread was stone ground flour, which retained bits of granite from the grindstones that gradually wore away the enamel. Diets that lacked sufficient vitamin C often lead to bouts of scurvy, which can lead to weakened gums and loss of teeth.

People did try to clean their teeth using sponges dipped in medicated wine or urine (!). Others used natural bristle brushes and pumice as a dentifrice. Many others rinsed their mouths, well, occasionally.

One individual wrote a brief article for the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1764 entitled Rules for the Preservation of the Teeth and Gums. In it he noted the fragility of tooth enamel:

"The teeth are bones thinly covered over with a fine enamel and this enamel is more or less substantial in different persons. Whenever this enamel is worn through, by too course [sic] a powder, or too frequent cleaning of the teeth, or eaten thro' by a scorbutic humour in the gums, the tooth cannot long remain sound, and more than a filbert kernel can, when it has been penetrated by a worm."

He then goes on to recommend a chewed stick of soft wood as a brush for cleaning the teeth:

"The teeth therefore are to be cleaned, but with great precaution, for when you wear the enamel off faster, by cleaning the outside, than nature supplies it within, your teeth will suffer more by this method, than by total neglect. A butcher's skewer, or the wood with which they are made, must be bruised and bit at the end, till with a little use, it will become the softest, and best brush for this purpose; and in general, you must clean your teeth with this brush alone, without any powder whatever..."

Why the author felt a chewed stick was better than a brush, is hard to say. Perhaps he recommended using a softwood stick as easier to obtain, especially for the poorer sorts. It may also be that he recognized that the brushed used hogs' bristles, which can penetrate the gums.

What is striking is his eschewing "*any powder whatever*". Pumice probably wore away the enamel faster than other substances, but the author goes on to recommend an occasional use of a tooth powder that is rather startling to modern eyes:

"...once in a fortnight, not oftner, dip the skewer brush into a few grains of gunpowder, breaking them first with the brush, and this will remove every spot and blemish, and give your teeth and unconceivable whiteness."

[The Gentle Reader is enjoined from making jokes about "blasting cavities to heck", as this Writer has worn out that line of "humor".]

At first glance the use of gunpowder for a dentifrice may seem to be one of those odd experimental ideas from the Age of Enlightenment. The major ingredient of gunpowder is charcoal, which was recommended by other contemporary sources as a dentifrice, Peter Shaw's A New Practise of Physic (1738) for example.

Another gunpowder ingredient potassium nitrate (a.k.a. saltpetre) is still used in toothpastes, especially for sensitive teeth.

Gunpowder residue is notably corrosive, which is why muskets and cannon need cleaning after firings. The author notes this for oral health as well:

"It is almost needless to say, that the mouth must be well washed after this operation, for the besides the necessity of so doing, the saltpetre, &c. used in the composition of gunpowder, would if it remain'd, be injurious to the gums, &c. but has not nor can have any bad effect in such a short time."

Apparently, the writer based his claims on his own experience:

"I have constantly practised this method for 25 years, and am thoroughly convinced it is safe and effectual."

While using gunpowder is a tad over the top, there is no denying that relief from tooth problems was much desired, as it still is today.

[Lest anyone think that the 1764 article is the product of this writer's fevered imagination or a species of "alternate facts", the Gentle Reader is directed to Google Books. Enter "Gentlemen's Magazine 1764". The article is found on pages 31 and 32.]

Update on AVAR Project

Phase 2 of the AVAR archeology project scheduled for 2020 has been put on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The artifacts collected last Spring have been taken to the NPS Region 1 Museum Services Center for cataloging which is ongoing. It is anticipated all of partners from the previous exploration will be returning for the second phase of the project when conditions allow.

The Arnold Monument (The Boot Monument)

By Debbie Murphy, Friends Board Member

Location: along the paved pathway of Tour Stop 7

Description: monument stands 3 feet, 8 inches in height.

Placed: 1887 by Saratoga Monument Association

Inscription: "In memory of the most brilliant soldier of the Continental Army who was desperately wounded on this spot, the sally port of Burgoyne's great [western] redoubt 7th October 1777 winning for his countrymen the decisive battle of the American Revolution and for himself the rank of Major General."

The Arnold Monument was designed by George Bissell and originally placed at the crest of the hill at the Breyman Redoubt Site. It was moved to its current location in 1975. The north side of the monument faces the road. It has a boot and a two-star epaulet draped over a howitzer barrel to symbolize an individual with the rank of Major General who suffered a wound during the October 7 battle at the Breyman Redoubt. A Laurel leaf wreath sits atop the howitzer, an emblem which often resonates victory, power, and glory. "The Boot Monument," is the only monument in the Saratoga Battlefield site that does not contain the name of the person being commemorated.



Sources: Saratoga National Historical Park – Facebook; Park's National Historical Register Application

Members Musings on SNHP...

"I love walking in the park. I love the Wilkinson Trail. I love the birds, the deer, the butterflies, and all the other animals who live there-even the snakes are interesting.

I have hiked there every weekend for approximately four years, and every other day since I retired a year ago. The peaceful atmosphere is reverent. There is a certain serene feeling I find there."Gwen July 2020

Watch for the Reflections of other members in future editions. Share your reflections by emailing Diane at dmck@nycap.rr.com

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